



STANFORD UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305 • (415) 321-1200

STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
Department of Genetics

April 5, 1971

Professor A. W. Wortham
Head
Department of Industrial Engineering
Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas 77843

Dear Professor Wortham,

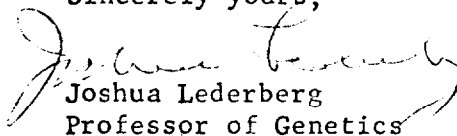
Thank you for your letter of March 30th. I share your concern about the possibilities of sabotage and clandestine attack with biological agents. If I have not spoken more about these publicly it is mainly for fear of planting an unhealthy idea into some psychotic mind. I think you will agree, however, that clinging to the privilege of developing offensive biological weapons affords no solution to the problem of clandestine attack! To the contrary, the development of BW technology will only increase the likelihood of its being used in this fashion.

Your remarks reminded me of a paper by K. F. Meyer, "Historical Notes on Disinfected Mail", The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, Vol. 116, No. 6, Dec. 1952. Other literature on this interesting subject might be found by conducting a citation index search on the Meyer article and on his references.

Since the mails have also already been used to convey explosives there is no doubt about the cogency of your concern about this vehicle of sabotage. Indeed, many people express their considerable concern over the dissemination of research specimens containing infectious material as a possible menace to public health, even without malevolent intent. For this and many other similar reasons I have advocated that we strengthen programs of defensive research that might be directed against both natural and intentionally malicious sources of infection.

If you wish to extend the work you are doing I would suggest that you intentionally load your specimens with known numbers of characteristic indicator (non-pathogenic) organisms in order to establish calculated rates of survivorship through the postal system. But I suppose I would have to caution you, in the public interest, against publishing your findings!

Sincerely yours,


Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr